

Atherton Building  
466 River City Mall  
Louisville  
Jefferson County  
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-137

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. KY-137

## ATHERTON BUILDING

Location: 466 River City Mall, northwest corner of River City Mall and Mohammed Ali Boulevard (formerly 4th and Walnut Streets), Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky.

USGS New Albany Indiana-Kentucky Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
16.608710.4234080.

Present Owner: Oxford Properties Inc.  
2226 Citizens Plaza  
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Present Use: Demolished 1980.

Significance: The Atherton Building, sheathed in glazed enamel brick with terra cotta ornament, was a fine example of an early twentieth century office building. The last intact commercial building in Louisville designed by prominent architect William J. Dodd, it contributed to the only intersection in downtown Louisville to retain its turn of the century buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1901.
2. Architect: William J. Dodd of Dodd and Cobb.

William J. Dodd (1862-1930) began his early career in Chicago, possibly attending the Chicago Institute of Art. Dodd served as a draftsman for William Jenney and S.S. Beeman on the town of Pullman. Dodd came to Louisville in 1884. His first partnership was with O.C. Whele. In 1889, he formed a partnership with local architect Mason Maury. The firm was responsible for the design of numerous Chateausque, Richardsonian and Victorian designed townhouses primarily in the Old Louisville area (National Register, Feb., 1975), as well as St. Paul's Church, a handsome Gothic Revival structure in the neighborhood. The firm also designed the old Louisville Trust Building (National Register, April, 1978), a striking example of the Richardsonian Romanesque, the Kentucky Building for the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and the Leiderkrants Hall, based on Gardiner's Paris Opera (destroyed).

From 1896 to 1904 Dodd was in partnership with Arthur Cobb, a Rennselear-trained engineer. The firm designed extremely fine and sophisticated Beaux-Arts structures including the Equitable Building (1897), the forerunner to the Atherton Building (destroyed), the Masonic Temple (destroyed), the Ferguson Mansion (Old Louisville), Fourth Avenue Methodist Church (National Register, July, 1979), and the Presbyterian Theological Seminary (National Register, March, 1978).

In 1905, Dodd worked with Frank M. Andrews of Dayton, Ohio on the Seelbach Hotel (National Register, Aug., 1975), one of the most celebrated hotels in the South.

In 1905, Dodd formed a partnership with Kenneth McDonald. The firm of McDonald and Dodd was responsible for some of the most important structures in downtown Louisville, including the Washington Building, influenced by Bruce Price's American Surety Building (destroyed), the Second Atherton Building (totally altered), Stewart's Dry Goods, Weissinger Gaulbert Apts. (National Register, Dec., 1977), Western Branch Library (National Register, 1975), and the First Christian Church (National Register, July, 1979). The firm was dissolved in 1913 with McDonald's retirement. Dodd moved to Los Angeles in 1913 and formed a partnership with William Richards. The firm of Dodd and Richards designed the Hollywood Branch Library, the Hollywood Blvd. Library, the Associated Realty Building, J.W. Robinson Department Store and the Ville de Paris in Los Angeles.

The six story enamel buff brick Equitable Building was the precursor of the Atherton Building. Designed by Dodd and Cobb in 1897, it was purchased by John M. Atherton in 1900.

The firm of McDonald and Dodd (1905-1913) designed the second Atherton Building at 4th and Chestnut Streets in 1907. This brick building with terra cotta and stone trim in stylized classical motifs was influenced by Frank M. Andrew's Paul Jones Building constructed in 1905, and the firm's Stewart's Dry Goods Building of 1906. The second Atherton Building also included a theatre. This building has been totally altered by a modern treatment applied to the entire exterior.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

The following is an incomplete chain of title for the structure. Reference is to the Jefferson County, Kentucky, Deed Books for the City of Louisville, Block 14 K Lot 51.

1900 Deed, March 30, 1900, Book 535, page 87.  
Trustees of Walnut Street Baptist Church to John  
M. Atherton

- 1920 Deed, 1920, Book 938, page 436.  
John M. Atherton to Peter Lee Atherton
- 1921 Deed, March 28, 1921, Book 968, p. 183.  
John M. Atherton, Peter Lee Atherton, Cornelia A. Atherton to Columbia Fidelity and Trust, in trust for Cornelia A. Atherton, Cornelia Atherton Serpell, Sara Atherton Neblett, and John Atherton
- 1954 Trust terminated January 1, 1954. Building held by survivors: Cornelia Atherton Serpell and Sara Atherton Neblett.
- 1980 Deed, January 31, 1980, Book 5148, page 705.  
Cornelia Atherton Serpell and Sara Atherton Neblett to Oxford Properties Inc.
4. Suppliers: Faced with Hydraulic Press Brick Company buff enameled brick. Builder and other suppliers unknown.
5. Alterations and additions:

Major alterations to the building included creation of the corner entrance, and closing the original entrance in the second bay of the east elevation sometime after 1938 (see historic view, HABS number KY-137-18); remodeling of second and third floor interiors. Building permits were destroyed in 1965. The following permits were, however, recorded in the Louisville Courier-Journal on the dates shown:

April 11, 1911 - Arthur Loomis, architect: \$2500 for rewiring

January 24, 1912 - \$30,000 for conversion of steam system to accomodate air conditioning

March 2, 1941 - \$175,000 for terazzo floors, new shop windows on south side of building and part of east side, upgrading of air conditioning system

A. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

John M. Atherton, builder of the Atherton Building, was a prominent local businessman and real estate developer. He was born in Kentucky in 1862 and raised in Louisville. He was in the distillery business between 1889-1899 and then in the real estate business and public affairs. He served on numerous local boards and commissions and in the Kentucky State Legislature. Atherton died June 5, 1932.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Caulfield and Shook Collection, University of Louisville Photography Archives, Louisville, Kentucky (see photocopies, HABS numbers KY-137-17, KY-137-18).

2. Bibliography

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Hedgepeth, Marty Poynter, "A Heritage of Louisville Architecture from the Victorian to the Beaux-Arts, 1873-1913: A Study of Four Louisville Architectural Firms", unpublished thesis, University of Louisville, 1980.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

The Brickbuilder, Volume XL, July 1901, page 53

Louisville Courier-Journal, Nov. 12, 1911; April 29, 1911; Dec. 23, 1901; Jan. 24, 1912

Louisville Herald Post, June 6, 1932

Withey, Henry and Elsie. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects: Deceased. Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970.

Information compiled by Lawrence P. Melillo, AIA  
Louisville, Kentucky  
March 14, 1980

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The Atherton Building is a five story structure built in the style popularized in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The five story building was sheathed in glazed enamel brick. Its first story windows were ornamented with terra cotta surrounds, and the upper stories ornamented with classical motifs also in terra cotta. The building was divided into three horizontal sections by varying treatment of the bays.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 162' 3" x 98' 6". Four bays (east

elevation) x 7 bays (south elevation). Five stories with basement.

2. Foundations: Poured concrete
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Yellow enamel glazed pressed brick with terra cotta trim for south and east elevations; common brick on north and west walls.
4. Structural system, framing: Combination brick bearing walls, steel framing, interior cast iron columns. Wood floor joists framed to steel beams.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Original doors and ornamental canopies replaced.
  - b. Windows: One-over-one-light double hung sash windows in "Chicago window" configuration of one large window flanked by narrow windows. Engaged terra cotta columns separate the windows, and fourth story windows are arched. Fifth story has four narrow windows separated by terra cotta piers in each bay.
6. Roof:
  - a. Shape: Rectangular flat built-up roof with two elevator penthouses.
  - b. Cornice: Extended terra cotta cornice with dentils and modillions crowned by anthemion.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. Basement: Divided in cages for clothing storage. Contains generator and circuits for building. Entered from street-level separate entrance.
  - b. First floor: Divided into three store fronts on east elevation, those at north end are one bay each and the one at the south two bays. Main store now entered from corner. Elevator bank containing three elevators located in center of main store. Columns run the length of the south side.
  - c. Second floor: Oval room surrounds elevators. Eight separate salons with dressing rooms are located on sides of oval. Dressing rooms run around perimeter of the building. This story was altered for department store use.

- d. Third floor: Similar to second floor.
  - e. Fourth floor: Rectangular space around elevators is surrounded by 21 offices which measure approximately 200 square feet each.
  - f. Fifth floor: Contains storage cages, fur vault, and mechanical systems.
- 2. Stairways: Three stairways run the entire height of the building. One runs down the rear of the elevator shaft, one runs along the fire wall on the north side, and one is in the rear (west) of the building and exits at street level.
  - 3. Flooring: Oak floors. First floor covered with terazzo after flood in 1937. Other floors covered with carpeting.
  - 4. Wall and Ceiling finish: Original plaster walls. New dividers and partitions used in the department store were plaster board and plywood. Original ceiling is pressed metal on all floors. False ceilings installed to hide fire sprinkler systems on lower floors.
  - 5. Openings: Simple moldings, averaging three inches wide.
  - 6. Mechanical equipment: Steam boiler and electric generator in basement replaced by four gas fired steam boiler on fifth floor.
- D. Site: The building is located on the northwest corner of Mohammed Ali Boulevard and River City Mall, in the heart of the downtown shopping district.

Information compiled by Lawrence P. Melillo, AIA  
Louisville, Kentucky  
March 1980

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are the result of a project undertaken by Oxford Properties, Inc., with Urban Development Action Grant funds provided to the City of Louisville by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. They were prepared in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to mitigate the adverse effect of the Galleria Project. John A. Burns, AIA, and Emily J. Harris were the HABS project coordinators. The records were prepared by Melillo and Associates, for Oxford Properties, under the supervision of Lawrence P. Melillo, AIA, in March 1980. The written data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Emily J. Harris in May 1980. Photographs were taken by Douglas Fowley in February and April, 1980.